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State Keeps Viet Study Secret

By Murrey Marder

Washington Post Staff Writer

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has met a flat refusal from the Nixon administration for security clearance of an analysis of Vietnam negotiations between 1964 and 1968.

In a letter to the committee, the State Department claimed that the committee's intended staff reports, based on four never-published volumes of the 47-volume Pentagon Papers, "could harm" present diplomatic efforts in the Indochina conflict.

The title of the suppressed report clearly suggests its contents: "Negotiations, 1964-1968: The Half-Hearted Search for Peace in Vietnam."

Committee staff members are continuing negotiations with the State Department to seek partial clearance of the report. One argument they are using against the blanket refusal of clearance is that President Nixon on Jan. 25 unilaterally declassified information on a dozen secret meetings between adviser Henry A. Kissinger and North Vietnamese negotiators in Paris.

The committee, headed by Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), is releasing today the first of a series of its staff analyses of the Pentagon Papers. This non-sensitive report, entitled "Vietnam Commitments, 1961," by staff researcher Ann L. Hollick, consists of 12 pages plus 26 pages of documents previously available publicly. Even so, there are several security deletions because the text used was the version published by the Government Printing Office, although the deleted material, on intelligence operations, was printed in newspapers last summer.

Sen. Fulbright said the published report on 1961 commitments underscores the "unprecedented . . . extent to which the Executive Branch misled both Congress and the public" in "policies and decisions of the first year of the Kennedy administration, which significantly deepened the U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam war."

First Broached by U.S.

This staff study emphasizes that "It was United States officials who first broached the subject of a bilateral treaty (with South Vietnam) and United States officials who pressed for a direct military involvement in Vietnam.

"Although news of the administration's consideration of combat troops did reach the public by means of leaks to the press, neither Congress nor the public was made aware of the intergovernmental discussions regarding a bilateral treaty."

The report also focuses attention on a 1961 recommendation by Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, then President Kennedy's military adviser, to send a 6,000 to 8,000-man U.S. military task force into South Vietnam "under the guise of performing flood relief work." That was first disclosed in press accounts last summer.

Troops Not Sent

The treaty never materialized, nor did the Kennedy administration send combat troops, which Taylor recommended. "Had one or both of these measures been carried out at that time," the report notes in retrospect, "a greatly increased national commitment to Vietnam would have resulted" much earlier. In the Johnson administration, U.S. troops reached over a half-million men.

Refusal to declassify the Fulbright committee staff's more sensitive report on negotiations was expressed in a letter dated March 9 by David M. Abshire, Assistant Secretary of State for congressional relations, to Fulbright.

Abshire noted that the intended staff report on "Negotiations, 1964-1968: The Half-Hearted Search for Peace in Vietnam," did contain, as he said Fulbright stated in a Feb. 17 letter, "partial information relating to some of these secret (negotiating) channels" that "appeared in public media..." But, said, Abshire, "it is the department's view that the substance of these volumes should remain classified." State's letter continued: "To disclose these secret channels and official communications relating to them would constitute a unilateral violation of confidentiality in diplomatic intercourse without which the diplomatic process cannot function effectively.

Potentially Harmful

"Moreover, such disclosure could harm and possibly preclude future use of these and other channels in our continuing efforts to deal with the issues of the Indochina conflict including that of our prisoners of war."

Abshire, in a postscript, expressed regret "that we cannot concur with your request" realizing "the diligent and extremely capable efforts of the professional staff" in preparing the report.

The reference in the suppressed report to "half-hearted search for peace" is understood to refer to efforts on both sides of the bargaining, American and South Vietnamese on one side, and North Vietnamese and Vietcong on the other. Published portions of the Pentagon Papers have shown that the allied side often was reluctant to have its search for negotiations succeed when the allied military position was weak. The unclear report presumably also deals with Communist reluctance to negotiate.

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